

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506

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April 9, 1982

MEMORANDUM FOR L. PAUL BREMER III  
Executive Secretary  
Department of State

LIEUTENANT COLONEL ROBERT P. MEEHAN  
Assistant for Interagency Matters  
Office of the Secretary of Defense

Executive Secretary  
Central Intelligence Agency

COLONEL CHARLES F. STEBBINS  
Executive Assistant to the  
Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff

SUBJECT: Issue Paper, NSSD 1-82

Attached is a draft Part III, Section C issue paper for discussion at the Interagency Review Group meeting on April 12, 1982 and subsequently for discussion at an NSC meeting now scheduled for April 16.

*Michael O. Wheeler*  
Michael O. Wheeler  
Staff Secretary

Attachment  
  
as stated

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Issue

What conventional force capability should be developed by the end of this decade to counter the Soviet threat to U.S. interests in Southwest Asia (SWA)?

Options

- Option A: To acquire, by the end of the decade, the capacity to deploy, support, and sustain military forces of sufficient size to deter a Soviet attack against Southwest Asia.
- Option B: To acquire sufficient capability to achieve U.S. wartime objectives in Southwest Asia against a Soviet attack without having to resort to expansion of the conflict beyond the region and its supporting lines of communication.
- Option C: To acquire clearly sufficient capability to achieve U.S. wartime objectives without resorting to expansion of the conflict beyond the region and its supporting lines of communication.

Facts

- The United States has two primary security interests in Southwest Asia: First, to prevent the Soviet Union from acquiring political-military hegemony in the region; second, to maintain continued western access to Persian Gulf oil. In wartime, our key objectives are to maintain control of and protect the Persian Gulf oilfields, transshipment points, and lines of communications.
- The Soviet Union possesses a marked advantage to deploy and sustain forces in Southwest Asia. That advantage will remain throughout the decade.
- The Soviet Union enjoys options of attacking on other fronts at least as attractive as ours.
- In order to project and sustain U.S. forces in Southwest Asia, the U.S. is and will remain dependent on substantial support from regional and extraregional friends and allies.

Description of Options

- All three options employ the same military components to enhance our deterrent posture: in-theater capabilities (to include substantial and continuous military presence in the Indian Ocean/Southwest Asia), with rapidly deployable forces, a clear commitment to combat Soviet forces in the theater and the potential for escalation. At least in this context, the threat of escalation is and will remain an essential element of U.S. deterrent strategy.

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- The distinction among the options is in the planned capability of U.S. forces to meet direct Soviet aggression in the region.

- Option A recognizes the Soviet military advantage in the region and the substantial escalatory pressures that would be present in any U.S.-Soviet conflict. This option would rely on direct combat in the theater and counteroffensives on other fronts early on, in order to dissuade the Soviet Union from continuing its attack and to ensure that the lines of communication to Southwest Asia were under U.S. control.
- Option B recognizes that it is in our interest to limit the scope of any conflict with the Soviet Union and that we should not prejudge the inevitability of escalation. This option would commit U.S. forces to engage fully Soviet forces in the region in order to prevent them from gaining control over the Persian Gulf. Soviet forces would not be engaged on other fronts unless the in-theater defense was unsuccessful or until after the Soviet Union widened the war.
- Option C. Like Option B, this option also recognizes that it is in our interest to limit the scope of any conflict with the Soviet Union and that we should not prejudge the inevitability of escalation. Option C would provide an even more robust in-theater capability to confront the Soviet Union directly in Southwest Asia in order to achieve our military objectives without resorting to geographic escalation.
- All three options recognize and plan for the potential of a U.S.-Soviet conflict in Southwest Asia to become a global war.

### Discussion

- Due to the global military capabilities of both superpowers and the interrelationship of strategic theaters, any U.S.-Soviet conflict will produce substantial escalating pressures.
- Deployed forces must be reinforced and sustained over lengthy lines of communication that are subject to hostile Soviet action.
- The United States must take precautionary actions worldwide to protect its vital interests. These actions will include mobilization and a heightened state of readiness for both strategic nuclear and conventional forces, both home and abroad. Similar actions can be expected from our allies and adversaries.
- If a conflict between the superpowers takes place in Southwest Asia, the outcome would have a critical impact on the economies of the U.S., Western Europe, and Japan.
- It is in the interest of the U.S. to limit any U.S.-Soviet conflict to conventional means. However, deterrence is enhanced by an integrated strategy which compels the Soviet Union to reckon with the probability of nuclear escalation and the resulting risks and costs. Additionally, geographic escalation and nuclear escalation considerations are linked.

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- ° In order to project and sustain U.S. forces in Southwest Asia, the U.S. will remain dependent on substantial support from regional and extraregional allies and friends. A significant increase in in-theater forces will require a corresponding increase in assured access, overbuild, basing rights, and other accommodations.
- ° Our military assessments indicate that, in the near-term, a successful in-theater defense against a determined Soviet attack cannot be achieved. This means that whatever option is selected for the long-term our current warfighting strategy will necessarily continue to place significant emphasis on geographic escalation.
- ° By acquiring a visible, robust conventional warfighting capability, the United States can hope to frustrate Soviet plans to establish political-military hegemony in the region in peacetime. In wartime, this in-theater capability could provide additional flexibility and may provide the U.S. an alternative to spiraling escalation or defeat.

RECOMMENDATION

Option A \_\_\_\_\_

Option B \_\_\_\_\_

Option C \_\_\_\_\_

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